*Tells the Facts and Names the Names*

# CounterPunch

OCTOBER 15, 1995 | *Ken Silverstein & Alexander Cockburn* | VOL. 2, NO. 18

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# Big Labor's Goon Squads

## Will AFL-CIO's New Chief Cut Them Off?

For over a generation the overseas arm of the AFL-CIO has been the accomplice of business and the enemy of effective unions around the world. This has been disastrous for foreign and American workers, since low-wage labor abroad encouraged U.S. companies to move overseas.

There will be one quick test of whether the new top man in the American labor movement intends a real shake up. These days unions must organize across borders, matching their corporate opponents. If they fail at this task they are nothing.

In Latin America, the American Institute for Free Labor Development, the AFL-CIO's subsidiary in the region, has been the ally of transnational corporations and of death squad repression of union organizers. The Institute — generally known as AIFLD (aye-feld) — has recently launched a PR blitz (with token bureaucratic reorganization to come) designed to portray itself as no longer a CIA adjunct but as a true friend of Latin American workers. However, its long-term chief, William Doherty, is still using AIFLD to undermine militant unions in the region, most notably in Mexico and Haiti, perpetuating the $4 a day labor that is the cornerstone of the "free trade" system protected by NAFTA and GATT.

On October 26, delegates at the AFL-CIO convention in New York will select a new president. The contest is between John Sweeney, head of the Service Employees International Union, and Thomas Donahue, candidate of the old guard. As No. 2 to Lane Kirkland, the outgoing president, Donahue has been complicit with the globo-cop role played by the AFL-CIO's International Department. Little or nothing can be expected from him.

Sweeney has offered himself as the candidate of change. But if he truly plans to clean up the AFL-CIO's international operations he will have to lay siege to a cold war fortress controlled by tenacious veterans of the national security system. What the Green Berets were to peasant counter-insurgency, AIFLD and its Asian and African equivalents (the Asian-American Free Labor Institute and the African-American Labor Center, respectively) have been to any labor organizing across the world that the US deems contrary to the "national interest".

In preparing this article we spoke with more than a dozen labor officials and activists. But such is the fear of AIFLD that only Chris Townsend, political action director of the United Electrical Workers — a union not affiliated with the AFL-CIO — agreed to speak to us on the record. He put the case bluntly: "You can't reform fascism. AIFLD needs to be exposed and defunded, its staff should be fired and its records turned over to investigators."

Since 1962, when it was founded in response to "the threat of Castroite infiltration and eventual control of major labor movements", AIFLD money has helped finance military takeovers in Latin America, such as the 1964 coup in Brazil and Gen. Augusto Pinochet's 1973 seizure of power in Chile. During the 1980s, AIFLD supported the Salvadoran government's unleashing of death squads on leftist trade unionists, claiming that labor activists were communist dupes.

Traditionally, some 90 percent of AIFLD's funding has come from government bodies such as the US Agency for

*(continued on p. 4)*

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# Colin Powell as Virtual Reality

The fascination with Colin Powell surely stems at least in part from the reassurance he offers to white America that the system is fair and that his life contains a greater truth about America than the fact that one out of every three young black men in this country is currently under some form of custodial supervision. He is a one-man cosmetic solution to the race problem.

In his autobiography, *A Soldier's Way*, Powell rises smoothly from poor beginnings in the Bronx to the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs. The memoir written by America's top soldier with the help of Joseph Persico, once a leading scribbler for Nelson Rockefeller, manages the extraordinary feat of filling 643 pages without giving the reader any sense of an interesting individual.

The real Powell must be a tougher and more artful, not to say cunning, customer than the soggy prose — half résumé, half sermon — discloses. The real Powell learned the crafts of political survival from some of the roughest customers in Washington. As a White House Fellow at the time of Watergate he absorbed the rudiments of bureaucratic butchery from Fred Malek, a Nixon hit man riding herd on the federal bureaucracy. He honed these skills under the expert tutelage of Frank Carlucci and Richard Armitage, both notoriously hard players at the Pentagon.

Mythic Powell emerges with honor and reputation unblemished from the attempted cover-up of the massacre at My Lai, from the Iran-contra arms scandal and from intimate and prolonged association at the highest levels of the Reagan-Bush administrations in their piratical and frequently illegal enterprises. The narrative carefully notes that its hero joined the Americal Division in Vietnam *after* the My Lai killings and duly supplied an army investigator with the relevant combat report from the Division's files.

## Quotes From Chairman Powell

### On Counter-Insurgency

From Captain Powell's 1963 combat diary:

- "10 Feb: Rain. Located evacuated village; destroyed houses and 100 K[kilos] rice, 20 K corn. Harassing fire on 3rd Co.
- 11 Feb: Rain. Killed 3 buffalo, pigs, chickens. Harassing fire from VC. 13 Feb: 2nd Co. made contact with VC. Bloodstains indicate cas [a possible casualty, since we still had not seen the enemy]. Crossbows, quiver of possible poison located vicinity of river.
- 18 Feb: Sprayed 2 hec [hectares] sweet potatoes, manioc destroyed."

### On War & Morality

"I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male. If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen, Lieutenant Colonel Walter Pritchard, was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong."

### On Hearts & Minds

"Helicopters delivered fifty-five-gallon drums of a chemical herbicide to us, a forerunner of Agent Orange. From the drums, we filled two-and-a-half-gallon hand-pumped Hudson sprayers, which looked like fire extinguishers. Within minutes after we sprayed, the plants began to turn brown and wither. Why were we torching houses and destroying crops? Ho Chi Minh had said the people were like the sea in which his guerrillas swam. Our problem was to distinguish friendly or at least neutral fish from the VC swimming alongside. We tried to solve the problem by making the whole sea uninhabitable. In the hard logic of war, what difference did it make if you shot your enemy or starved him to death?"

**Powell complacently recounts his role as unofficial leader of a South Vietnamese unit that destroyed peasant livestock and defoliated crops.**

### On the Contras

"The next big question was what to do about the contras, who were still fighting the Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The back-door aid to the contras that Ollie North had arranged to get around a congressional ban had created the messiest part of the Iran-contra affair. But that fact did not detract from the justice of the contra cause." ■

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Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions,
$25 student/low-income
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*(Powell, continued from p. 2)*

The real Powell sidetracked an accusatory letter from Tom Glen, a soldier who tried to expose the rampages of Lieut. William Calley's brigade, and maintained ludicrously in his report that "relations between American soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent".

The memoir gives no evidence that Powell has ever had an interesting idea in his head or entertained a dangerous notion or suffered from a second thought. He complacently reprints portions of his combat diary of 1963 when he was an unofficial leader of a South Vietnamese unit destroying peasant livestock and defoliating their crops (see box). He regurgitates Reagan-era claptrap without remorse, whether it be the "extended airstrip" that justified the invasion of Grenada, or the Sandinistas "exporting" their revolution.

Powell prides himself on having been a team player. But aside from a few offensively trite regrets about Vietnam (mainly recycled, inglorious Weinbergerisms to the effect that a war is only worth fighting if victory is assured before it begins) he doesn't devote a single page to reflection on what exactly his team was up to all those years. He honors the Reagan-era military budgets and notes the advance of inner city blight in America without reflecting that the two phenomena might be linked. He lauds the army as the most democratic institution in America, which for a black American it may well be, but

**Aside from a few trite regrets about Vietnam, Powell doesn't devote one page to reflection on what his team was up to.**

seems clueless on how to extend that democracy to the civilian front, beyond rebuilding the reserve officer training corps.

Powell admires Reagan for being an inspirational leader with a facility for outlining goals in simple language. The memoir of "the boy from the Bronx who lived the American dream" has exactly that timbre: a self-satisfied "I am somebody" spelled out in evasion and the banal. ■

# Punch Bowl

Back in the late 1940s, Leon Keyserling, one of Truman's economic advisers, successfully promoted "military Keynesianism" — military R&D and procurement — as ballast for the economy. Half a century later, without a serious enemy in sight, military Keynesianism rolls majestically on. Next year, the US will spend $247 billion on defense, only a fifth less than the peak budget of $311 billion in 1991.

**A few years ago, the Pentagon was paying $31 for a hinge used on an aircraft engine's inspection door. Today, that same hinge costs $2,187.**

The army's combat battalions are down nearly half, and the navy and air force have similarly shriveled. Where is all the money going? Yes, to the arms contractors.

We proudly give you the $2,000 hinge. To be precise, the $2,187 hinge, as mounted on the inspection door used by technicians to examine an aircraft's engine. A few years ago the Pentagon was buying this same hinge commercially for $31.

Many had thought that after the $600 toilet seat scandal of the 1980s, such grotesque billings by the aerospace manufacturers had ended. Indeed, last year Clinton signed the Federal Acquisitions Streamlining Act, designed to open up the Pentagon to the austere discipline of "free market" forces. "The president's signature ... on a new law reinventing much of federal procurement deserves more than a passing yawn", Kenneth Allard, an Army colonel, wrote in *The Washington Post* at the time. "Not only can these reforms save hard-pressed tax dollars, but the nation's defenses may one day depend on the streamlined, more efficient procedures now being put in place."

After the Clinton team "reinvented" the procurement process the Pentagon began buying hinges and door knobs and other stock items from defense contractors, who were thus afforded the opportunity to mark up the price: $31 for the hinge, and $2,156 for handling costs.

According to a Pentagon watchdog, who provided us with this information, the Pentagon is now paying $1,000 for a standard doorknob. Keyserling would have been proud. And remember, the $2,187 hinge is not alone. Everything else on the plane goes through similar markups. That's how we end up with a $247 billion military budget.

## Moon for the Misbegotten

Fred Singer is one of the right's in-house scientists. On topics ranging from global warming to ocean dumping, conservatives trot Singer out to debunk environmentalists and assert that there are no ecological problems that can't be solved by the free market.

*The Washington Post* recently described Singer as an "ozone specialist" and president of the Virginia-based Science and Environmental Policy Project. The *Post* quoted his remarks — "There is no scientific consensus on ozone depletion or its consequences" — from a September 20 hearing before the House Science subcommittee on energy and environment. However, the *Post* failed to mention, or did not know, that Singer's group has gotten money from a wide varieties of oil companies and from the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

A few years ago, Singer invited Michael Shuman of the Institute for Policy Studies to have lunch with him at The Washington Institute, an outfit Singer then headed and one which, like his current home, was funded by Moon. Shuman says that the Institute's enormous downtown offices were plush, and replete with vast conference rooms and costly office equipment.

During Shuman's visit, Singer was the only person on the premises. Shuman noticed an oil painting of the Rev. Moon, and asked Singer about his connection to Moon and the Unification Church. "You never know," replied the scientist. "He may be the Son of God."

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## Woodward's War

Following **CounterPunch**'s July 15 article, "How Rich Journalists Stole Crutches From Crippled Children", the bogus charges against the federal children's disability program have been exposed. Still, Congress continues to try to gut the program. The welfare bill recently passed by the Senate, with overwhelming Democratic support, would, according to Health and Human Services estimates, immediately cut 157,000 children from the program and deny benefits during the next few years to a total of 225,000 children.

The Senate bill is headed for conference with the House, where things can only get worse. Newt Gingrich's troops passed an appalling bill earlier this year which would virtually wipe out the program.

**When Forbes rushes to the defense of a social program, it's a sure sign that said program is beyond reproach.**

In its September issue, the *Forbes Media Critic* carried an article by Christopher Georges of *The Wall Street Journal*, "A Media Crusade Gone Haywire", which also attacked press coverage of the children's disability issue. When *Forbes* rushes to the defense of a social program, it's a sure sign that said program is beyond reproach.

Georges focused on the role of Nora Cooke Porter, who before being fired worked at Social Security offices in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and who was the primary source for Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post*, Chris Wallace of ABC's *Prime Time Live* and other well-heeled hacks who have rushed to denigrate children's disability. Porter promised Georges she would provide him with "documentation for some, not a lot, of cases", but later refused because "the information is confidential". Porter also conceded to Georges that while she had previously told journalists that two-thirds of program recipients were frauds, she had never in fact examined any children personally but only reviewed their medical records. ■

*(Labor, continued from p. 1)*

International Development, the quasi-public National Endowment for Democracy and the US Information Agency. The Institute's chief goal was "teaching workers to increase their company's business" — in the words of J. Peter Grace, who once sat on AIFLD's board of directors along with executives from ITT, Anaconda, Kennecott and other firms with major interests in Latin America.

The clearest evidence of continuity at AIFLD is its top man. In charge, as he has been since 1965, is William Doherty, whom Philip Agee once tagged as a "career CIA agent". Last year, Kirkland pressed the Clinton administration to name Doherty as ambassador to Guyana — this after AIFLD helped topple the left-leaning government of Cheddi Jagan in the early-1960s. The State Department was willing, but Jagan, who regained the presidency a few years ago, made clear that Doherty's nomination would not be accepted.

AIFLD's role as envisaged by Doherty and his cohorts (and as broadcast through its training programs for Latin American labor leaders at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies in Silver Springs, Maryland) is to shape labor organizers as accomplices in the corporate model of free trade. A 1993 course, as the prospectus put it, "analyzed the adjustment programs which are taking place in Latin America," this referring to the neoliberal recipes which have thrown millions into poverty. Classroom materials were "complemented with field trips to the IMF and the World Bank".

AIFLD's idea of an instructive outing was to take a group of visiting Latin unionists on a tour of a "model" plant in Hagerstown, Maryland, run by the Rohr corporation. Rohr had bought the plant in the mid-1980s after the previous owner, Fairchild Industries, had downsized, cutting employees from 2,100 to 500 over a period of three years. Before closing the deal, Rohr forced the United Auto Workers, which represented workers at the plant, to sign a five-year no-strike pledge. Naturally, these latter facts were not mentioned.

AIFLD's prime operating method is to find a leader whom the Institute can effectively control with financial handouts, and to assemble round this leader a compliant union. "They don't build unions, they build client relationships to serve US geopolitical interests," one of our informants remarked. "The only thing they know how to do is grease palms."

Since AIFLD has typically been most active in countries where US "national security" is at stake, it's not surprising to find the Institute's two biggest current drives are in Mexico and Haiti. Its strategy is clearly to play a watchdog role against any serious independent labor organizing, particularly among workers employed by US firms.

The Institute's work in Mexico has been backed with more than $100,000 from the National Endowment for Democracy. AIFLD is also receiving money from the Agency for International Development to enhance "the independence of Mexican trade unions", so they "can better fulfill their role as intermediary institutions that serve to promote sustainable growth".

The actual function of AIFLD may be better gauged by its long time support for the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the official union linked to Mexico's ruling party, the PRI, and headed by the notoriously corrupt Fidel Velasquez. Whenever Mexican workers sought to establish independent unions, the Confederation served as the government's enforcer, ousting the wayward leaders and sending in goons to break up strikes.

Last year, the AFL-CIO finally announced that it would recognize non-CTM unions as legitimate representatives of Mexican workers, and some AFL-CIO organizers have done fine work in Mexico, especially helping organize maquila plants in the border region.

But privately Doherty still praises the CTM and derides independent unionists. One of the few independents who has received his blessing is Francisco Hernandez Juarez, head of the Telephone Workers Union, who was once described admiringly by the *Los Angeles Times* as "Exhibit A for a government trying to sell Mexico to international investors".

Earlier this year, AIFLD began visiting cash-strapped independent groups along the U.S.-Mexican border, and seeking to obtain information in exchange for financial backing. At the head of this drive was Gordon Ellison, a retired FBI agent who has worked for AIFLD since at least the early-1980s, when he did stints in El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Carl Gershman, president of the Na-

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tional Endowment for Democracy and a peculiarly rabid cold warrior, once called Ellison one of the people who made a "sterling contribution" to the downfall of the Sandinistas.

Mary Tong, of the San Diego-based Maquila Support Committee, recalls a visit Ellison paid her. "He claimed that he wanted to monitor human rights violations but he had no questions about human rights. All he wanted was a list of contacts — in the media, academy and community groups — whom he could fund."

Michael Verdu and David Jessup, AIFLD's human rights monitor and a long-time ally of Gershman's, have assisted Ellison in Mexico. Verdu helped open AIFLD's office in Haiti after "Baby Doc" Duvalier fled in 1986, and offered support for the short-lived military regime led by Lt. Gen. Henri Namphy. In the 1980s Jessup helped set up the right-wing Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD) — funded by the anti-labor Scaife and Mellon foundations, as well as by the Oliver North network. Its prime function was to red-bait Church groups who opposed the Reagan administration's policies in Latin America.

Labor and social organizers tell us AIFLD knows very little about the border economy or the maquila industry. Its grant money from the Agency for International Development was meant to keep the Institute afloat in a period of thin budgets. "There are US organizers who have been trying to develop relationships with groups in Mexico for many years," Phoebe McKinney of the American Friends Service Committee's Maquiladora Project tells us "That work is slow, sensitive and delicate, and it's been disrupted by AIFLD coming in and throwing its money around."

Doherty's other big push is taking place in Haiti, where AIFLD set up shop in 1986. The Reagan administration had the Institute step in, as administration officials explained to corporate executives at a briefing in June of that year, because "of the presence of radical labor unions and the high risk that other unions may become radicalized .... Responsible labor union development is essential if Haiti is to maintain its competitive standing among Caribbean countries".

AIFLD's closest ally in Haiti has been the Federation of Trade Union Workers, a group created during the Duvalier years for the express purpose of demonstrating that Haiti respected worker rights and therefore merited duty-free status for its exports under the Caribbean Basin Initiative. With money from the Agency for International Development, AIFLD has been paying the salaries, rents and electricity for the Federation. It has also given money to about a half-dozen of Haiti's other unions, which were decimated during the past few years of military rule and are desperate for funding.

AIFLD's December 29, 1994 program proposal to the Agency for International Development said the Institute would help "prepare the democratic trade union movement for its vital role" in last June's parliamentary elections and otherwise contribute "in vital ways to the success of the national democratization process". It's not entirely clear how AIFLD has been carrying out this mission, but the International Republican Institute — the GOP's foreign policy think tank with which it is closely affiliated, and which also received election-related AID funding — openly sought to favor political forces opposed to Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the June vote. In a report issued the day before the actual balloting, it declared that the elections, which were swept by Aristide's forces, "seriously challenged the most minimally accepted standards for holding a credible election".

Heading up AIFLD's Haiti operations is Jean Claude Coupet, who previously worked for the Institute in El Salvador. Coupet has consulted with Lionel Delatour, chargé d'affaires at the Haitian embassy in Washington during the Baby Doc years and now head of the Agency for International Development-financed Center for Free Enterprise and Democracy, which brings Haitian business and political leaders to the U.S. to


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meet with Congress, State Department and intelligence officials. The Center has promoted harrowing public sector layoffs in Haiti and a freezing of the minimum wage, all "to improve [the country's] attractiveness ... as an investment destination".

AIFLD has also been working with Caribbean/Latin American Action, a group of right-wing U.S. and Haitian business leaders whose board recently included Elliott Abrams. The organization is best known for successfully lobbying the Bush administration to exempt about 50 maquiladora-style assembly plants in Haiti — which paid workers as little as 14 cents an hour — from the international trade embargo against the former military junta. Clinton similarly respected the maquiladoras for a long period, only shutting them down in mid-1994, just a few months before Aristide's return.

With AIFLD's backing, the maquiladoras have resumed operations. Doherty wants Haitian workers to make no trouble. At one point, he suggested they accept only token wage increases over the next severa years — a very unattractive proposal viewed in the light of Haiti's rampant inflation. Such behavior by AIFLD has angered unionists at the newly-merged International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, who fear that U.S. apparel firms will quickly move to establish new sweat shops and export even more jobs to Haiti.

AIFLD claims that it has united Haiti's unions, but such consensus has been achieved by cutting off anyone who balks at the Institute's leadership. Doherty let it be known that AIFLD would not work with the officer of one Haitian union because his politics were too radical. That officer interpreted this as a threat, and felt compelled to step down from his position. "AIFLD says it wants everyone to work together, but there's no discussion about strategy", a US unionist who recently visited Haiti told us. "You either cooperate with their agenda or you get left out."

An independent labor researcher, Eric Verhoogen, paints a grim portrait of this AIFLD-led "unity". He says that

**In Haiti, AIFLD has worked with a business group that promotes public sector layoffs and a freeze on the minimum wage.**

AIFLD's allies in the Port-au-Prince-based union federations do little other than hold conferences and issue finely-worded but politically toothless joint statements. Verhoogen visited 15 maquiladora plants and found that workers at ten of them were not even receiving the minimum wage. Not a single plant was unionized. "There's no connection between the folks at union headquarters and organizing at the plants", he told us.

Many within the U.S. labor movement know that an aggressive new stance towards international organizing is long overdue and that strong unions in the Third World are good for First World workers, as better wages and working conditions in the South discourage capital flight from the North. But Donahue isn't likely to change anything. In addition to being Kirkland's man, he's backed by the AFL's most conservative figures, such as Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers and John Joyce of the International Union of Bricklayers. Donahue's daughter-in-law, Emily, works under David Jessup at AIFLD.

Sweeney's platform calls for the creation of a Transnational Monitoring Project, which would promote organizing campaigns at multinational corporations. But when it comes to international affairs, Sweeney's hardly a radical: in the past he's hired many AIFLD people at his union, including Martin Doherty, William Doherty's son.

Doherty is in his late 60s and reportedly wants to remain at his post until he's 70. If he's allowed to stay on, don't expect any change in the way the AFL-CIO operates abroad, and even if he goes any effective challenge to the rule of transnational capital will require a revolution in the way Big Labor looks at the world. ■

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